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Special meeting on the global food crisis

Provisional summary record of the 8th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 21 May 2008, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. Mérorès ..... (Haiti)

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Statement by the President of the Economic and Social Council

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Statements by Member States (*continued*)

1. **Mr. Takasu** (Japan) recalled that Prime Minister Fukuda, in his capacity as the Chair of the G-8 had announced his intention to take action on global food prices as a priority issue at the next G-8 Summit and had requested input from the United Nations system. At the forthcoming Fourth Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD IV), measures would be devised to strengthen agricultural production in African countries.

2. The newly established Task Force on the Global Good Security Crisis was to prepare a comprehensive plan of action for consideration at the High-Level Conference on World Food Security in Rome. That Conference should produce a firm political commitment to tackle the crisis and a road map with guidelines and timelines for international action. A well-coordinated response from the United Nations system organizations and international financial institutions was essential and the plan of action would serve as the basis for international collective action.

3. Escalating food prices had already triggered social and economic unrest in many developing countries. The international community should start by focusing on emergency food aid. Japan had already pledged $100 million for emergency food aid over a three-month period. However, that was not enough. Equal attention should be given to longer-term strategies to increase domestic food production and establish food security in each State. For a long time, agriculture and food production in developing countries had not received the high priority they deserved in terms of budget allocation, financial assistance, investments and technology research and development. Technical and financial assistance was needed to improve food production capacities and food stocks in developing countries, including Africa. The upcoming TICAD IV would be an opportunity to discuss the promotion of agricultural production and productivity through measures such as capacity-building, irrigation and other infrastructure development. Japan would contribute to doubling rice production in Africa in collaboration with other countries and organizations, in part through dissemination of a new high-yield breed of rice that was tolerant of dryness and pests. Biofuel production should be compatible with the need for food security.

4. With the present high level of momentum and political commitment for international collective action, the present challenge offered an opportunity to achieve food security for all. Japan was ready to take the lead in tackling that common challenge.

5. **Mr. Gonsalves** (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines) said that the current crisis was merely a symptom of deeper structural flaws in the global economic system. Food scarcity and high prices had already led to riots and political instability within the CARICOM region. His country would continue to provide modest assistance to the most affected CARICOM States, but far more needed to be done.

6. His Government was attempting to mitigate the escalating cost of imported food by increasing local production. The National Food Production Plan provided for free fertilizer to producers of staple foods; distribution of subsidized seedlings; scientific screening of crop varieties; aggressive use of tissue cultures; financial assistance for agricultural diversification; and increased farmer education.

7. Those local measures could not insulate the country against price increases and shortages. Unequal trade liberalization damaged competition and climate change was ruining age-old farming and fishing livelihoods. Production of biofuels in their current form was irresponsible and should be halted; agricultural subsidies should also be eliminated. He therefore welcomed the pledges made by the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Japan and the United Kingdom to provide food aid and hoped that other States would consider similar initiatives. Petroleum-producing States also had a special role to play in mitigating the current emergency. After congratulating the Secretary-General on his announcement of a high-level task force and stressing the crucial importance of fisheries in any analysis of food supply, he reminded States of the importance of meeting their ODA commitments and of cooperating with developing States to produce better crops.

8. The high consumption levels of a minority of people on the planet were irreparably damaging the planet's health and productive capacity. Although the polluters were not currently suffering the effects of changing weather patterns, they had a moral obligation to take steps to remedy the situation. Unless structural changes were made to the economic system and production structures, the situation was likely to get

much worse. The international community should resolve to tackle not only the current emergency but also the root causes of the issue.

9. **Mr. Natalegawa** (Indonesia) said that the current crisis was caused by interlinked factors, ranging from increased demand to declining rates of productivity growth. Rising energy prices affected farmers' costs and their access to necessities such as fertilizers. The international trading system, including agricultural subsidies in developed economies, had also had an adverse impact. The solution had to be a multi-pronged and sustained approach that was comprehensive and coordinated.

10. The first imperative was to reach those most affected through the World Food Programme (WFP). In the long term, a sustainable global platform for food security was needed. Agriculture and rural development were important, not only for sustainable development, but also for global stability. Agricultural policies should be reviewed with a view to increasing production. Comprehensive action to address climate change with both adaptation and mitigation actions would contribute to global food security and the Doha Development Round should be concluded as soon as possible.

11. His delegation welcomed the Secretary-General's decision to establish a task force to deal with global food crisis and suggested that a global mechanism should be established to serve as an early warning system on food security. It might also be worth considering the possibility of a high-level meeting that would focus on food security at the beginning of its sixty-third session of the General Assembly. All nations would need to work together to deal with the crisis.

12. **Mr. Abdelaziz** (Egypt) said that the recent leap in commodity prices would have grave consequences for developing countries' efforts to achieve the internationally agreed development goals. The international community must act swiftly to deal with the crisis which was due to a variety of factors including climate change, increased biofuel production and the negative effects of trade-distorting agricultural subsidies in developed countries, particularly in the light of the impasse in the Doha Development Agenda negotiations.

13. Lack of interest in development of the agricultural sector in developing countries over the past few years, particularly from the international financial institutions, had also contributed to the current crisis. The share of investments and ODA devoted to agriculture was low. Food security was the most immediate goal, as it directly impacted progress towards other development goals.

14. He hoped that the international initiatives proposed in response to the crisis would all be implemented. The outcome of the current meeting would provide input for the high-level meeting in Rome which was intended to mobilize international support and produce a concrete plan of action. Increased coordination and coherence between all the initiatives and meetings was crucial.

15. The current crisis required concrete policy actions at the national, regional and international levels, with provision of sufficient policy space for developing countries, and actions on an immediate, medium-term and long-term basis. The Secretary-General's call to provide immediate support for WFP and FAO, while also working on medium and long-term responses, was a good example in that regard. The recently established Task Force would present a comprehensive plan of action to the high-level conference in Rome. All Member States should be involved in its follow-up. Finally he supported the idea of holding a high-level debate at the beginning of the sixty-third session of the General Assembly to take stock of the situation.

16. **Mr. Normandin** (Canada) said that the international community should bear in mind the potential impact of the food crisis on progress related to the Millennium Development Goals. In response to emergency needs, Canada had not only recently increased its annual food aid by US$ 50 million, but had also announced the untying of all its food aid contributions, with a view to providing Canada's food aid partners with greater flexibility for procurement of food commodities and improved response capabilities. Over the long term, policies that promoted supply in developing countries would be most effective.

17. Canada appealed to all countries to allow unhindered humanitarian access to ensure that food supplies would be delivered to those most in need. In addition, it was important to further analyse the specific implications of the food crisis on fragile States and to take into account the situation in such States when developing a coordinated international response.

Finally, it was crucial to look to medium- and long-term solutions that addressed the underlying causes of the global food crisis, to strengthen governance, to develop sound agricultural policies and to promote trade reforms that focused on increasing global food security.

18. **Mr. Mansour** (Tunisia), noting that many people affected by the global food crisis lived in rural areas, said that it was of the utmost importance to invest in agriculture and to enable greater access to markets for those areas, so as to increase agricultural production and provide higher incomes for farmers. Given that a great number of regions were suffering from hunger, it might be necessary to re-evaluate prospects for achieving the Millennium Development Goals while bearing in mind that any prolonged food crisis could lead to instability. International institutions working in finance and trade must focus increasingly on food production policy and food must be a key focus of the Doha trade negotiations.

19. Finally, he recalled that the President of Tunisia had recently called for all oil-rich countries to contribute one dollar for every barrel of oil to the World Solidarity Fund, with a view to protecting the world from famine and instability.

20. **Mr. Sen** (India) said that the real cause of the current crisis was not rising consumption levels in developing countries — for that had been going on for a decade — but rather excessive and unsustainable consumption levels in developed countries.

21. The past two years had seen a 1 per cent annual increase in oil demand, yet oil prices had risen by 90 per cent. It was not just a question of high oil prices affecting food prices: low food prices and high oil prices had encouraged the sale of food grains to energy producers for conversion into energy. In several developed countries, land used for food crops had been lost to biofuels. He therefore welcomed the call for the elimination of biofuels made on the previous day.

22. The financial crisis had also had a direct impact as speculators, encouraged by the dollar's relative decline, had "invested" in food futures. That bubble would eventually burst and bring down prices at least marginally.

23. The Special Rapporteur on the right to food, had pointed, in a recent report, to a system-wide incoherence for whereas FAO, WFP and UNDP were working for that right, the Bretton Woods institutions were advising countries not just to export surplus food (which was appropriate) but to shift from food crops for the domestic population to cash crops for export (which was harmful). When Malawi had ignored that advice and had reintroduced fertilizer and seed subsidies, it had rapidly become self-sufficient and even a net exporter of food. He therefore objected to any suggestion of eliminating restrictions on food exports in the interests of market purism. Such advice from the Bretton Woods institutions was partly responsible for the crisis in the first place.

24. The international community could do a lot collectively. The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) could look at solutions for the problems of small and marginal farmers and other international bodies could look at key areas such as land development, water management and seed technology. During the Green Revolution, improved seeds had been available and the intellectual property rights (IPR) had been in the public domain. Now, thanks to the Agreement on Trade-related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS Agreement), those rights were in the private domain and were contributing to food price inflation. Addressing TRIPS was as important as eliminating agricultural subsidies in the developed countries, and he was pleased that the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom had acknowledged as much at the previous meeting.

25. Finally, as the Prime Minister of India had pointed out, a new global compact was needed, a compact between the developed and developing countries, between the land surplus and labour surplus economies and between food exporters and food importers.

26. **Mr. Løvald** (Norway) said that Norway had already pledged the equivalent of $20 million to counter the humanitarian consequences of the food crisis in Africa, of which $12 million would be allocated to WFP activities in a number of African countries. It had also provided support to the Exogenous Shocks Facility administered by the IMF.

27. As no single institution or agency could resolve the hunger crisis, his delegation welcomed the Secretary-General's Task Force and its broad perspective. Partnerships and coordination within the United Nations and other humanitarian and development actors were vitally important.

Coordination could be improved by involving the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and by making the most of the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), to which Norway was a leading contributor.

28. Increasing in agricultural production and rural development was an obvious priority and should be combined with measures to ensure that the farmers themselves, including smallholders, were able to benefit more directly from the prices paid by consumers. The private sector could contribute to achieving real results in agriculture. Norway had engaged Yara, the world's leading plant nutrient company, in a public-private partnership aimed at ensuring timely and affordable supplies of fertilizers to small farmers for the next planting season.

29. The substantial reduction of developed countries' agricultural subsidies and tariffs was an important issue in the Doha Round negotiations. Norway was committed to doing its part to comply with the mandate of those negotiations.

30. While agreeing that biofuels policies must be consistent with food security and environmental sustainability, he said that biofuels were not necessarily a major factor in the increase in food prices. The issue merited further study and careful monitoring. Finally, he said that Norway was willing to work to counter the effects of the global food crisis. Developing countries should not have to carry the full economic burden of the cost increases.

31. **Mr. Borg** (Malta) said that, as a net food importing country, Malta was particularly concerned about the impact of the food crisis. The rise in food prices had aptly been described as a "silent tsunami", which was affecting millions worldwide. His delegation therefore welcomed the decision to create a high-level Task Force on the subject.

32. Discussions should focus on sustainable agriculture. Many farmers in developing countries could not afford the necessary equipment; assistance from the international community would help increase food production and create new work opportunities. Climate change was also affecting water supplies, and that could lead to regional instability. A coordinated response led by the United Nations and involving all stakeholders was therefore essential.

33. **Ms. Blum** (Colombia) said that the causes of the food crisis were complex and called for an objective, comprehensive analysis. The General Assembly was one valuable forum for discussion. Colombia welcomed the creation of the Task Force, and called for communication mechanisms to be established between Member States.

34. The food crisis had drawn attention to the importance of addressing the imbalances in the international trading system. There was a pressing need for developed countries to commit to reducing in protectionist measures and agricultural subsidies, which discouraged agricultural investment in the developing world.

35. The growing energy demand was also a concern. However, misgivings about the use of biofuels were not necessarily justified. In Colombia, the production of biofuels from crops such as sugar cane and palm oil had boosted the agricultural sector and created thousands of jobs without affecting food production. Nonetheless, given the increase in global fuel demand, it was essential to promote cooperation with the developing world through capacity-building, technology transfer and increased international market access.

36. **Ms. Banks** (New Zealand) said that there was a need not only for immediate food security to those already dependent on humanitarian aid, but also for long-term investment in agriculture in the countries most affected. Reform of agricultural markets was essential, as were tariff reductions. For those reasons, a successful and rapid conclusion to the Doha Round of negotiations was urgently required.

37. New Zealand welcomed the newly created Task Force, and looked forward to the forthcoming Conference on World Food Security.

38. **Ms. de Chamorro** (Nicaragua), after thanking Japan and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela for their recent pledges regarding increased emergency food aid, expressed her delegation's support for the Task Force created by the Secretary-General, and stressed that any proposed strategy needed to be debated and approved by the General Assembly.

39. The deeper causes of the crisis stemmed from an international economic order detrimental to farming in developing countries. Her delegation hoped that the various activities and meetings scheduled for the

coming months including the Doha Round and the sixty-third session of the General Assembly would create the political will for a radical change in the world economic order. Finally, she pointed out that Nicaragua had asked the Secretary-General to circulate a document with the findings of the recent summit on food security held in Managua.

40. **Mr. Davide** (Philippines) said that the Philippines had called for a thematic debate on the food crisis in the course of the sixty-second session of the General Assembly, and for a high-level event to be convened thereafter.

41. In particular, it was important to provide funds to the International Rice Research Institute in the Philippines, the world's main repository of rice seeds and of genetic and other information on rice. The spread of brown plant hoppers was affecting rice harvests in East Asia.

42. As professor Jeffrey Sachs had asserted recently, the fate of global society depended on its developing new forms of global cooperation. The sixty-second session of the General Assembly must seek to carry out that task.

43. **Mr. Reina** (Honduras), referring to some of the causes of the food crisis — such as agricultural subsidies, the energy crisis, climate change and international trade barriers — said that although his country had been working to make progress in implementing the Millennium Development Goals, particularly with respect to chronic and acute malnutrition, rising food prices threatened to endanger further progress. Moreover, although renewable biofuels represented a huge economic potential, production of biofuels must not be allowed to endanger food security. He stressed the need for strategies aimed at providing farmers in developing countries with training seeds, fertilizer and equipment so that they could increase their production and make a decent living.

44. The Latin American and Caribbean countries had been discussing such topics at the regional ministerial conference for the eradication of child malnutrition and, at a recent meeting in Lima, between the Heads of State of those countries and the European Union a proposal had been made to establish a green fund in order to facilitate full implementation of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

45. **Ms. Gallardo Hernández** (El Salvador), noting that factors such as the economic crisis in the United States of America and rising fuel prices had contributed to the food crisis, said that Professor Sachs had rightly stressed the need for the international community to continue supporting farmers in middle-income countries. New funding mechanisms were needed to help developing countries overcome the crisis. In that connection, France's proposal for a global partnership for food and agriculture looked promising.

46. El Salvador was proposing joint action on a regional level, and had established a multidisciplinary commission to consider domestic responses. In that regard, the country had the capacity to expand cultivation, but it lacked the necessary technology. A law to expand cultivated land was under consideration, as was a project to distribute improved seed varieties to farmers. Her Government remained committed to the collective and multilateral search for solutions.

47. **Mr. Yousfi** (Algeria), said that the current food crisis, exacerbated by commodity market speculation, had revealed systemic dysfunctions of the world economy which required structural solutions. Rather than rising oil prices, the major factor in the crisis had been the growing monopoly of a number of international companies on certain agricultural commodities. Another factor was shrinking agricultural production in developing countries following the implementation of agricultural policies recommended by the World Trade Organization, which were based on comparative advantage and focused on boosting trade flows.

48. The newly established Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis should establish the bases for a global strategic framework of action in the short and long term to deal with the effects of the current food crisis. The immediate priority was to provide food to the hungry by increasing food aid but longer-term solutions were needed, especially with regard to increasing agricultural productivity. In that regard, it was essential to ensure close coordination of national and international policies on production of agricultural staples. Furthermore, the international community must support the gradual incorporation of the right to food in the context of food security and, more broadly, human security.

49. **Mr. Wolfe** (Jamaica) said that the food crisis would impact negatively on development and international food security. In the medium to long term, progress toward achievement of the Millennium Development Goals might well be stymied.

50. The increase in the price of fertilizer and animal feed had served to exacerbate an already dismal situation in his country. As a result, the Government had launched a series of national initiatives in an effort to promote agricultural activities and reduce duties on certain food imports. At the regional level, the Caribbean Community had recently held a special meeting to examine the impact of food prices on the living standards in the region. The Latin American and Caribbean Economic System would soon be convening a High-level Regional Meeting on Food Security in Latin America and the Caribbean, in Caracas, in order to formulate responses to deal with the crisis and coordinate common regional positions in preparation for the upcoming Conference in Rome.

51. Long-term investment in agriculture at the national, regional and international levels was critical in order to prevent similar situations in the future. Countries should, at the very least, strive to produce enough to satisfy domestic consumption. It was equally important to achieve a timely and successful conclusion of the Doha Development Round. In the short term, contributions to humanitarian agencies such as the World Food Programme must be stepped up.

52. His delegation looked forward to receiving the recommendations of the newly established Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis and agreed with those delegations which had suggested that those recommendations should be presented to the General Assembly for further review.

53. **Ms. Aitimova** (Kazakhstan) said that the worsening situation of the world economy and the food crisis had cancelled out the impact of all previous humanitarian efforts by the international community and it would now be difficult to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. Many countries in diverse regions of the world were experiencing food shortages.

54. In view of the growing food shortage in world markets, Kazakhstan was taking measures to ensure its own food security. The Government was allocating funds from its reserves for the purchase of basic food products and storing them close to major cities in preparation for external food crises. It had also placed a temporary ban on corn exports until the next harvest in order to stabilize the domestic food market.

55. Kazakhstan, a leading producer of corn, also had enormous potential in its livestock production, which was based on ecologically and genetically sound methods. As high fuel costs, the financial crisis and the food crisis were causing inflation throughout the world. Kazakhstan could play a significant role in both the energy and food spheres.

56. As the President of Kazakhstan had stated at the World Economic Forum on the Middle East in Sharm el-Sheikh, if the world financial crisis was a problem then the world food crisis was a tragedy for millions of people on the planet. That crisis could only be resolved through coordinated action from the international community. Kazakhstan hoped that the Secretary-General's Task Force would be successful in its work and also welcomed the fact that the world food crisis would be discussed at the FAO Conference in June and at the next G-8 summit. Those meetings should contribute to finding effective ways of overcoming the global food crisis. Kazakhstan would submit its own proposals for addressing the problem.

57. **Mr. Hannesson** (Iceland) said that his Government stood ready to do its part in taking necessary measures to resolve the international food crisis; it had already responded to the extraordinary appeal of the World Food Programme to meet emergency needs.

58. Given that gender equality in agriculture was of paramount importance in addressing the crisis, the Icelandic International Development Agency had cooperated with partner countries in promoting equal rights and active participation by women in the economy, thus strengthening local food security. Iceland had also stepped up support for the work of the United Nations Development Fund for Women.

59. In an effort to contribute to sustainable solutions, Iceland would soon be launching a United Nations University programme on soil technology, based on its long experience in reclaiming land from erosion. It had also developed the United Nations University Fisheries Training Programme, which reflected the country's emphasis on the importance of providing training and sharing technology for sustainable fisheries, as major contributors to the food supply of some the world's poorest peoples. Enhancing food security and

increasing food production had been at the core of Iceland's bilateral development cooperation, which had focused on capacity-building projects in southern Africa, Asia and Central America, mainly in the field of fisheries. Additional Government-led measures were currently under consideration.

60. **Mr. Sow** (Guinea) said that Guinea had been particularly affected by the current crisis, resulting from the combined effects of rising oil prices, climate change, decreasing official development assistance and the financial market crisis — all at a time when the new Government's reforms had just begun to bear fruit. In response to the food crisis, the Government had taken steps to provide for its population in the short, medium and long term. Urgent measures included establishing a National Council for Food Security, the signing of a private-public partnership for stimulating agricultural development, the creation of funds to finance agreements, and the adoption of a national action plan on climate change.

61. To revitalize the agricultural sector, which had great potential, Guinea was also relying on the synergies created through common initiatives to be taken by key stakeholders at the local, regional and international levels. In that connection, he welcomed the recent Mano River Union Summit on the problems generated by the food crisis.

62. **Mr. Matenje** (Malawi) said that the food crisis required urgent, collective action by the international community, but, even more importantly, by national Governments. Over the past three years, his Government had launched bold initiatives to help farmers buy basic agricultural inputs, and, as a result, his country had produced more food than it needed in all three seasons. In support of the subsidy programme, the Government was scaling up extension services so as to transfer knowledge and skills to small farmers. The Government was also investing in irrigation and water development as a long-term strategy to ensure sustained food security. The implementation of such initiatives, whose overall aim was to bring down the cost of food and make Malawi a hunger-free nation, involved all stakeholders; in that regard, steps had been taken to ensure the full participation of women, who accounted for around 70 per cent of all Malawi smallholder farmers.

63. However, external factors continued to imperil the progress made thus far. His delegation therefore supported developing measures towards a concrete action plan; in particular, it agreed that the food crisis should be a focus at the sixty-third session of the General Assembly. He called upon the international community to assist developing countries, especially the least developed countries, to adapt to and mitigate the effects of climate change. It was also crucial for the international community to eliminate agricultural subsidies and tariffs during the Doha Development Round in order to stimulate economic growth in developing countries.

64. **Mr. Bui The Giang** (Viet Nam) said that, in response to the global food crisis, his Government had implemented a number of immediate measures to stimulate the economy and support the agricultural sector. The situation in Viet Nam had essentially returned to normal, with the curbing of food prices and the right to food being guaranteed to the majority of the population, especially the poor. The Mekong Delta, i.e. the main rice paddy stock of Viet Nam, had just recorded a bumper harvest, thereby ensuring domestic food security and enabling the country to honour existing rice export contracts and to consider signing new contracts. His Government was working closely with foreign partners on possible rice trade agreements, notably with Asian and African countries, and was preparing for the upcoming Fourth Tokyo International Conference on African Development.

65. There was no single solution to the global food crisis, nor could it be solved by any one nation. Meeting the needs of the hungry was an immediate priority; in the long term, it would be imperative to raise the awareness of policymakers and the general population on the vital role of agriculture and the need for investment in the sector. Developed countries should follow through on their commitments to finance development, especially in the agricultural sector, and to provide further technical assistance in agricultural capacity-building and technological transfer. The continued support of donors for South-South cooperation in agriculture was also crucial.

66. **Mr. del Rosario Ceballos** (Dominican Republic) said that he would like to see the General Assembly take on a more active role in addressing the global food crisis. The Secretary-General played an important role in mobilizing the resources and interests of the United Nations system to deal with the present challenges.

67. In Latin America and the Caribbean, as elsewhere, rising food prices were affecting the poorest areas the hardest. In the Dominican Republic, the combined effects of rising oil prices, high food prices and recent natural disasters were likely to stifle the economy. It was thus crucial to formulate a new approach to global food policy that, rather than focusing solely on hunger or malnutrition, also encompassed energy, climate change, subsidies, investment and other issues, all of which were interconnected.

68. To help mitigate the effects of the crisis, the President had proposed that two funds be created: a Global Food Solidarity Fund and a Global Oil Assistance Fund, both of which would be aimed at helping developing countries that imported primarily food and fuel. The Funds, which could be supported by countries having benefited from the high oil prices and developed countries having reduced their official development assistance, would be used to provide social protection measures immediately to the most vulnerable groups. Aid would be provided in the form of concessional loans with low interest rates, extended grace periods payable over the long term. Thus the financial surpluses generated in oil-exporting countries would be recycled to help reinvigorate the world economy.

69. **Ms. Núñez Mordoche** (Cuba) said that while sustainability criteria for the production of biofuels could be discussed, the exclusion of staples such as grains was absolutely essential; anything else would pose a serious threat to food security and the enjoyment of the right to food as a basic human right. It was important to consider the various underlying causes of the crisis, such as the unequal distribution of wealth at the global level and within individual countries, which made the rich richer and the poor poorer.

70. Unregulated trade had created unlimited opportunities for multinational agribusinesses. Instead of promoting a balanced trade system that took into account the needs of developing countries, WTO had strengthened the position of the dominant players internationally. Indeed, the demands being made as part of the Doha Development Round for developing countries to further liberalize trade would merely increase their dependence on food imports. Over time, the mass import of food, usually highly subsidized, had discouraged local production and agricultural investment in developing countries, causing the agricultural sector to sink into a state of utter neglect. Moreover, the failure of developed countries to meet their official development assistance commitments had dealt developing countries a terrible blow.

71. If the issues of energy crisis and climate change were to be addressed effectively, developed countries must lead the way by changing their unsustainable production and consumption patterns; meeting their commitments under the Kyoto Protocol without pursuing new conditions; and setting more ambitious goals with regard to emissions reductions under the agenda adopted at the United Nations Climate Change Conference. The Doha Round must become a truly productive development forum. Governments needed to build up their food reserves at the national and regional levels in order to tackle the problems engendered by price volatility and food insecurity. It was also time to discipline the large multinational corporations of the agroindustry and energy sector by introducing a tax on their profits. The money would go into a United Nations fund for agriculture in developing countries.

72. UNDP and other agencies should shift part of their efforts to facilitate the transfer of modern agricultural technology to developing countries and to assist in building the capacity necessary for the urgent transformation required in the agricultural sector, including the development of basic infrastructure. He welcomed the newly established Task Force and expressed the hope that its results would be submitted to Member States for consideration.

73. **Mr. Olinger** (Luxembourg) commended the initiative to hold the special meeting on the global food crisis as an example of the revitalization of the Economic and Social Council. The international response required actions in the short, medium and long term as part of a coherent strategy. In the short term, emergency food aid must be increased, while ensuring that humanitarian assistance did not have unintended consequences. His Government had made an immediate contribution of €1.3 million in emergency aid to WFP and had intensified its cooperation with its partner countries in West Africa. It was working with the Government of Niger to apply the lessons learned from the 2005 food crisis in that country to take preventive action, as well.

74. In the medium and long term, coherence among global agricultural policies and the effects of climate change must be taken into consideration. The Doha Round must be completed from a development perspective, and policies regarding biofuels must be re-examined. Above all, investment in agriculture in developing countries was key, in order to increase food security. The crisis must be transformed into an opportunity for a "green revolution", especially in Africa.

75. **Mr. Okio** (Congo) said that the continuing deterioration in the food situation called into question highly-publicized commitments regarding food and sustainable development made at various meetings over the past decade, starting with the World Food Summit in 1996. Immediate measures included increased investment in agricultural development and research, protection of biodiversity, reform of trade policy and stabilization of oil prices. Observance of the International Day for Biological Diversity on 22 May would highlight the relationship between biodiversity and agriculture. It was also important to stress the need to change behaviours in emerging economies, whose expansion had led to increased demand for fuel.

76. In an effort to address the food crisis before it undermined the country's hard-won peace and stability, his Government had held a meeting of the Council of Ministers devoted exclusively to the rise in food prices and shortages of basic foodstuffs. It had decided on a package of short, medium and long-term measures to meet the peoples' basic needs, in line with the commitments it had made in its negotiations with the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank and the need to balance the State budget. It had taken immediate steps to strengthen the capacity to regulate prices for the coming three to six months, promote the establishment of commodity purchasing centres through implementation of trade facilities and waive import duties for agricultural inputs.

77. The work of the Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis and the forthcoming Rome Summit were vitally important in addressing the threats to global peace and security represented by the current crisis, and the Council had a major role to play.

78. **Mr. Loayza Barea** (Bolivia) said that the international community as a whole must identify economic policies to promote food security and mitigate the impact of the crisis on the most vulnerable groups. Food security implied that human health was taken into consideration and that food was produced in harmony with nature, rather than the current trend towards genetically-modified crops and biofuel production, which would lead to competition for arable land, water and other resources and a decline in food production.

79. The current crisis could be turned into an opportunity to develop a collective response, harmonize development priorities and achieve sustainable solutions. Bolivia welcomed the initiative by the Secretary-General to establish the Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis.

80. Bolivia was promoting an agricultural revolution that would redistribute land and provide opportunities for more families to become productive in harmony with nature. Interest-free credit was being made available to small farmers, whose economic interests did not come before social and environmental interests. That agricultural model better met the changing needs of society and was more sustainable.

81. Structural change was needed to address the causes of the food crisis, rather than just its effects. For example, agricultural subsidies in developed countries had the effect of flooding the markets of poor countries, distorting prices, diverting investment from the agricultural sector and leading to dependency. Food became merchandise, with high prices being charged for land, seeds and water, all of which until recently had been public goods. Bolivia intended to reclaim the right to food sovereignty and control of its agriculture.

82. **Mr. Kim** Bong-hyun (Republic of Korea) said that the international community was faced with a situation where hard-won progress towards the Millennium Development Goals could be lost due to skyrocketing food prices. Since the crisis had multiple causes and effects, the response should also be multifaceted and comprehensive. The United Nations, in close cooperation with the Bretton Woods institutions, must take the lead in coordinating global efforts.

83. The challenges presented by the food shortages raised long-term concerns that must be addressed. The World Bank predicted that food prices were likely to remain high through 2015; under those circumstances, multifaceted policies encompassing strategic, long-term approaches along with immediate food assistance were required to ensure sustainable food security.

84. His delegation was dismayed to hear that roughly a third of food shortages were believed to result from bottlenecks in local markets and distribution systems. Immediate steps must be taken to improve market efficiency in order to prevent such shortages. As a country which overcame hunger and poverty within a relatively short period of time, the Republic of Korea was willing to assume its share of responsibility, and was an active participant in humanitarian assistance; it had contributed $1.5 million to WFP in 2008.

85. If handled properly, the current crisis could become an opportunity to deal with the root problems of many of the world's poorest people. It was clear what must be done; all that was needed was political will and leadership to translate commitments into action. The upcoming conference in Rome would be another forum for developing a common strategy.

86. **Mr. Ney Cardoso** (Cape Verde) said that the food crisis could have serious and long-term repercussions for sustainable development and poverty reduction. An increasing number of people were confronted on a daily basis with hard choices between food, health or education. The food crisis, added to the energy crisis and climate change, presented a threat to global peace and security, and the special meeting must make concrete recommendations on those issues. Achievement of the Millennium Development Goals had been put at risk, highlighting the need for a holistic approach to development. In an interconnected world, there could be no progress in climate change mitigation without progress in sustainable development. Fair trade, including the successful completion of the Doha Round, and cancellation of debt for developing and middle-income countries were also essential elements of sustainable development.

87. Cape Verde had graduated from the list of least developed countries in January 2008. Structural vulnerabilities remained, however, and its fragile economy could not absorb the effects of climate change and rising oil and food prices. The Government was concerned about the possibility of stagnation or reversal of its development process. Given that it was highly dependent on imports of fuel and basic commodities, the repercussions of those factors on the economy and the people's lives could be severe. The Government had taken steps to alleviate the impact of rising prices, but it counted on international solidarity from its development partners in meeting those challenges. The price of inaction would be unacceptably high.

88. **Mr. Liu** Zhenmin (China), reviewing some of the complex reasons for the jump in food prices, such as extreme weather conditions, high energy prices, huge export subsidies on agricultural products by developed countries, use of grain for biofuel production, market speculation and devaluation of the United States dollar, said that it was not appropriate, however, to put the blame on improved living standards in some developing countries.

89. The international community bore a shared responsibility for global food security. Its efforts should be focused on increased assistance to the poor through food aid or food subsidies to developing countries, more investment in agriculture through financial and technical assistance, the successful conclusion of the Doha Round leading to the establishment of an equitable multilateral trading system, and giving priority to the role of the United Nations.

90. His Government attached great importance to agriculture. Over the past decade, China had produced the bulk of its food domestically; with less than 9 per cent of the world's arable land, it had been able to feed its 1.3 billion people. His Government was deeply concerned about the impact of rising food prices on developing countries and the financial shortfalls faced by international food assistance programmes. There was still great potential for increased global food output. If the international community strengthened its cooperation and improved the trade environment for agricultural products, developed countries increased their assistance to low-income countries and local government attached importance to agriculture, the situation of global food security would surely change for the better.

Statement by the President of the Economic and Social Council

91. **The President**, summarizing the discussion thus far, said that the special meeting was the first held in response to the 2005 World Summit Outcome. In responding to that complex crisis, all countries must act together urgently. There was a clear role for Governments, the United Nations system, development banks, non-governmental organizations, civil society,

the scientific community, academia, the private sector, philanthropic organizations and the media.

92. Many delegations had stressed the need to pay attention to the medium- and long-term response to the crisis. There was a need to go beyond maintaining past levels of aid delivery in the short term, and to redouble efforts to get food to the hungry. Afflicted countries should immediately put in place targeted food and nutrition support measures and social safety nets with priority for maternal, infant and child programmes. Small farmers must be given the ability to meet the production needs for the next growing season. The research community must bring its knowledge to bear in order to provide a better understanding of food markets.

93. In the medium to long term, donors should re-examine their sectoral allocations of official development assistance to counter the decline in aid to the agricultural sector and in support of infrastructure. A special concerted effort was needed to address the crisis in Africa, home of the largest number of least developed countries. Participants had called for substantially increased donor funding for publicly supported research and development, extension and rural infrastructure to boost agricultural productivity. The Bretton Woods institutions should consider providing financial support to those low-income developing countries that would initially face adjustment costs and worsening food insecurity for the higher global prices associated with agricultural trade liberalization.

94. Governments had been urged to rethink their biofuel policies. The net economic impact and the environmental and social impacts must be balanced and made part of strategic policy. There was also a need for greater regional dialogue and cooperation to enhance regional food security that would facilitate quick responses to local food shortages. He called on private sector partners, in particular the food industry, to consider the need to keep food and agricultural inputs affordable for the world's growing population, and encouraged the global philanthropic community to expand grants to partners in the poorest countries geared towards improving agricultural productivity and increasing food production.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.